

62 THE DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF 1914

Secret Treaty of Reinsurance (concluded with Russia in 1887 for three years) on the morrow of his fall which removed the last serious obstacle to a partnership between Paris and St. Petersburg. If Napoleon used to say that he feared nothing but a hungry Paris, it was the " nightmare of coalitions " which had kept Bismarck awake. When he was gone the danger at once began to materialize. After twenty years of impotence France had recovered her self-confidence and escaped from her narrow cage. The Triple Alliance remained stronger than its rival, but it was no longer supreme.

With the wire to St. Petersburg cut and the Dual Alliance in being, it was vital for Berlin to maintain the friendship of England unimpaired. There were six Great Powers in Europe, of which three were now in one camp and two in the other. England stood aloof, though " splendid isolation " was an attitude, not a principle. She had taken part in the Crimean War and she might intervene in Continental struggles again. Her policy rested on the two time-honoured maxims of Naval Supremacy and the Balance of Power. The first she defined in 1889 by the formula of the Two Power Standard (the British Navy to be stronger than the two next Continental fleets combined), with her eye on France and Russia. The second meant that she tended to oppose, by diplomacy or war, any European state at once so strong and so potentially hostile as to threaten her safety. Bismarck had little respect for our institutions or statesmen, but he fully realized the decisive part we could play. In 1879 and again in 1889 he sounded us about an alliance, and when, yielding to a growing demand, he established a Colonial Empire in 1884 he achieved his purpose without forfeiting our good will. Caprivi, his succes-

sor in the Chancellorship, equally understood that, so long as England remained friendly, France and Russia would scarcely dare to attack the Central Powers; and William, erratic and temperamental though he was, knew too much of the British navy to underestimate its strength.

Here was the acid test of the men who succeeded Bismarck—the young Emperor, Caprivi, Marschall, the Foreign Minister, Holstein, the most influential member of the Foreign Office, Hohenlohe, the third Chancellor. Russia was lost: could the confidence and good will of England be retained? The Kaiser's telegram to Kruger, congratulating him on the repulse of the Jameson raid in January, 1896, gave the reply. Anglo-German relations had been friendly enough in the last